Fostering a Multi-Faceted View of European History: the CROSSCULT project

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European history is highly interconnected by nature. However the history-related experiences offered today to the wider public, from schools to museums, often interpret history based on a localised view that does not account for the intricacies of cross-border cultural values. This "siloed" presentation prevents history and culture from being viewed as a collective, global experience that comprise many viewpoints and interpretations.

CROSSCULT is an H2020 European research project that started in March 2016. Its goal is to spur a change in the way European citizens explore, reflect and interpret their common History by asking them to (re-) interpret what they may have learnt, in the light of cross-border connections among historic sources, cultural venues and other citizens' viewpoints. The project has two expected outcomes. The first is to lower cultural barriers and create unique cross-border perspectives, by connecting existing digital historical resources and by creating new ones through the participation of the public. The second outcome is to provide long-lasting experiences of social learning and entertainment that will help towards the better understanding and re-interpretation of European (hi)story.

Addressing the complex task of history re-interpretation requires the use of new Information and Communication Technologies and the building of connected pervasive systems, which allow a seamless mix of the physical with the virtual world. To do so, CROSSCULT relies on a variety of technologies, from gaming and augmented reality, to personalisation and sporadic social networks, integrated into one dedicated platform that allows their further reuse by interested stakeholders in the future.

The project strongly invites the first-hand involvement of the European public. Through four pilot experiences citizens can discover, evaluate and reflect on existing digital resources, connected through historical themes or events. Using situational curiosity and serendipity the public will also gain insight as to how the same historical evidence may be interpreted differently by people of different backgrounds. The pilots cover different contexts: a large multi-thematic venue; many small interconnected sites; a venue featuring non-typical view of exhibits; and multiple cities with a past and present historical interplay. Each pilot triggers different elements of history reflection and uses different technology combinations (Table 1).

Table 1. The set of elements that are used to trigger history reflection differ from pilot to pilot

Cognitive phenomena	Reflection, (re)interpretation, relation and comparison.
Modes of participation	Individual, collaborative (in small or large groups)
Types of content	Academic (venue-specific or open) and/or crowdsourced (participants provide new links and contents).
Content delivery mode	Narrative, exploratory or serendipitous.
Modes of interaction	During the visit (synchronous or asynchronous) and post-visit.
Types of connections	Intra-venue and inter-venue; related to context features of time, space, topic-related.
Situatedness	Physical and/or virtual.

Eventually, through the proposed pilot experiences, the participants will have the chance view the presented past and present societies with a critical mind, and to evaluate major events and characters under the light of new interconnections among the economic, political, cultural and environmental factors that shape history.